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ABSTRACT

The token gestures towards job equality for women in the fields of physical education and athletics coaching are symptomatic of the more serious problem of sexual equality present in American society. Cultural restrictions on the kind and degree of assertive behavior traditionally associated with the female role have left women ill-equipped to assume positions of leadership which should be awarded to women as well as to men. An example of this problem is clear in the present situation in women's athletics. Added financial support for women's sports has made the field more attractive as a career choice: consequently, men are beginning to assume the higher-paid and more prestigious positions in women's sports. Female physical educators and coaches must be made to realize the gravity of the situation, and must condition themselves to effectively counteract the emerging inequality through self-assertiveness, political awareness, the development of managerial thinking styles, and the establishment of a "good old girls" system similiar to the "good old boys" system traditionally closed to female professionals. (IH)

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High School Athletics: Coaches/Controversey/Crisis*

by
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PART I: A Look at the Forest: What's Happening to Women in High School Athletics

Most of us look at Title IX and how it has effected the development of high school and college women's athletics programs and admit that there have been numerous financial and opportunity benefits accrued by coaches, administrators and students involved in these programs. Budgets have increased, coaches salaries have improved, programs have expanded - the works! However, few people realize the real cost of Title IX to women professionals in athletics and the eventual effect on our students that this diminution of the number of women involved in coaching and administering athletics will have.

It is important for us to take a hard look at what's happening. Why are more and more women leaving the coaching ranks? Why are they being replaced with men? Why are women athletic administrators losing both power and positions? Why are they subservient to men or being replaced by men? Why aren't we sensitive to what is happening? Why aren't we doing something about it? These questions are not easy. However, I'd like to try to tackle them with you today...to more carefully explore the myth and reality surrounding women coaches and administrators in high school athletics.

"Coaches/Controversey and/Crisis" is the subject of two NAGWS sessions this afternoon. In PART I I'd like to take "A Look at the Forest - What is Happening to Women in High School Athletics and Why" and in PART II I hope we'll share some ideas on "What Female Coaches and Administrators Can Do to Cope With and Change the Current Situation in High School Athletics."

I suspect that many of you are somewhat surprised at the focus of these two sessions. It probably sounds as if I'm suggesting that women are being pushed out of high school athletics and are being replaced by men. I am. You're probably thinking that such a thesis smacks of feminism. It does. The word "feminism" probably scares you. It shouldn't. You're probably saying to yourself: "I'm not one of those - a feminist! I'm certainly no radical. What's going on here? This is athletics - sport -not politics." Even politics might have a negative connotation for you. Will you hear me speak about politics? Yes you will. Some of you may even be thinking: "I know why women are getting out of athletics - they can't take the pressure. There are not enough qualified female coaches. Women don't want to work the long hours. Women aren't qualified to head merged departments. They've had little or no experience with high school revenue-producing sports like football and basketball. Women simply aren't as competitive as men."

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I would suggest to you that your thoughts, these issues - are smoke screens which hide a far more critical, controversial and central issue. Should women be allowed to govern and control women's interscholastic athletics programs - at the very least - and the even more heretical contention - should women have an equal part in coaching and governing men's and women's interscholastic athletics?

The most difficult conceptual task for us to face is acceptance of the fact that these are not athletic issues - we are facing women's issues. What seems to be a simply explained athletic phenomenon is really a surface smokescreen which hides long and complex roots leading to our culture's attitudes toward females and the reaction of a male dominated society to the prospect of sharing power with women. Failure to accept such a premise is naive. It is important to realize that the tendency for women in athletics to be naive is far greater than in most professions because, for the longest time, we have been permitted by men to play our little games, run our own physical education and athletic programs, get together for tea and cookies and operate low budget, low priority programs. With money comes power and Title IX gave money to women in athletics. Women's athletics has now become lucrative enough for men to get interested in it and they are picking and choosing what they want to have - and getting it...the highest salaried coaching positions...control of the pursestrings - with little or no fighting back by the women who are being displaced because we are so used to men taking care of us, especially when it comes to money and other such important things - and because they have so much more experience. Men are so much more politically astute. They have the connections...the good ole boys club...and access to the real power structure of our educational system. Men get what they want - simply by wanting. Women get what they want - by fighting for it...and unfortunately we have not been taught the ways of fighting - we do not have the tools.

Let me assure you that I'm not angry at men. I am simply describing the reality of our society and trying to impress you with how important it is for all women to see it and understand it...and to use this information to protect themselves against the inevitable: that we must protect our positions -that we will eventually be forced to defend our position - our right to be a part of women's athletics - especially when our positions become desirable acquisitions for men in athletics to pursue.

The first indication you will receive - that we are receiving now - that men are interested in taking over - is the appearance of smokescreen issues - crises - and controversey in women's athletics. Please allow me to give you my opinions - my unedited impressions so to speak - of what they are.

SMOKESCREEN #1

"We need to hire a man. There are no qualified women coaches available."

The notion of not having qualified women around is an interesting contention. As a matter of fact, it seems that most women are usually better qualified than men in corresponding positions

in terms of training and degrees. It's funny - but not really - that athletics is the only educational program which does not require a certified professional in most states. Yet, certification is required to be a librarian or to teach driver education. Yet no such certification is required to work with children who are ill equipped to participate in the high pressure environment - psychological and physiological - of competitive athletics. Although the degrees are there, women physical education professionals don't seem to have specialization skills because we've been taught to be jacks of all trades, masters of none. However, we are good enough to coach "minor sports" but not qualified enough to coach "major" sports. Why is it that women are qualified to take the tennis team but not the basketball team?

SMOKESCREEN #2

"Finances dictate that men's and women's physical education and athletic departments be merged - and of course we will give the head job to the male. He is more experienced and has already established the contacts and he already is head football coach."

The prospect of submerger of women is inevitable in athletics more so than in physical education because the credentials for success in athletics are won/lost records, previous participation and coaching experience and the attachment of importance to involvement in revenue-producing sports.

SMOKESCREEN #3

"Finances dictate we give the coaching job to the male history teacher because we can't afford another full-time physical educator and the female history teacher doesn't have any ability to coach."

This smokescreen issue preys on past deprivation of athletic opportunities for women in all areas. Few women outside physical education have had athletic opportunities.

SMOKESCREEN #4

"Women physical educators don't want to coach. They don't want to become involved in fund-raising."

No wonder. Our high school women are overworked. They are educators who don't sacrifice teaching responsibilities for coaching responsibilities. Male coaches have more of a tendency to choose one over the other in terms of intensity of involvement. Women seem to be superwomen. They teach, coach and go home to take care of families. If they're not married, coaching becomes a financial problem. Married male coaches frequently benefit from dual income families. In addition,

there seems to be a tendency for men to discourage women from coaching. If women aren't encouraged, if they don't get the necessary support, they are more likely to be insecure and doubt their ability to coach.

SMOKESCREEN #5

"I have no choice, I must give the job to a male. He's a friend of the superintendent of schools or a member of the Board of Education."

Women have no access to the influence present in these high managerial and/or elected positions - to the "good ole boys" club. Athletics is political and women have not been involved in the political.

SMOKESCREEN #6

"Female athletes prefer a male coach."

Unfortunately, we've already socialized our female student athletes - brainwashed is a better term - into believing that males are stronger/more knowledgeable/tougher and better than women when it comes to sport. They know. They've been there. Women haven't. This is an unfortunate opinion because few people doubt that female coaches seem to be more humanistic. They're more sensitive to student needs - less apt to be dictatorial. This strength is often interpreted as a weaker approach to sport instead of one which is characterized by a greater respect for the individual. Female athletes are also convinced that they will benefit from the "good ole boys club" via access to athletic scholarship connections. What will happen to role models for these young women? Are we investing in their future demise in terms of access to career choices? Are we contributing to the perpetuation of the very system that will discriminate against them? Do we owe them a greater legacy than "more bats, balls and uniforms?" How about future career opportunities?

These smokescreens are subtle. There are also not so subtle tactics that are used on women who aren't cooperative, who aren't convinced - those who see the forest despite the trees. These kinds of people are being harassed. They are being labeled as man-haters and lesbians. Overt force is being used: "I'm sorry - you'll have to pick up two more classes this term" - or "coach one more sport" - or "practice at an ungodly hour" -or we've had to cut your sport due to budget cuts". Try bringing a Title IX complaint - or fighting for a higher budget - or an EEO complaint. See what happens!

And if you're thinking college is any better...it's worse.. and the data to prove it is easier to come by. Before Title IX, 95% of Division I athletic programs were governed by women in structures separate from men's athletics. That figure today is 36%. During the past four years, the number of men coaching women's teams has increased by 139% compared

to an 89% decrease in the number of women coaching women's teams. Female athletic directors are being relegated to associate director titles under merged department structures. The NCAA and NAIA have both initiated efforts to take over women's athletics. The situation is no different at the high school level. The National High School Federation takeover of women's athletics in the last 10 years is a prime example as well as the federation takeovers of women's officiating. How many women are officiating your state high school basketball championship games...the really important games? It's truly an interesting time. It's so much easier for women to ignore what's happening - to escape through ignorance - to not fight - it truly is.

What makes things worse yet is that the system has created an ideal and supportive environment for competent women to "knife" other women. The better you are, the more incentive you have to identify with the male power structure - to convince yourself that you're as good as a man. That is the highest compliment that can be paid. "She's as good as any of my male coaches - if not better!" Women are not in a position to criticize men's athletics. They can't afford to. Therefore they criticize other women who aren't as good. It's a lot like beating up on the youngest child in your family. We must realize that doing this is playing into their hands -allowing them to divide and conquer us - destroying our own support system. When we're all alone, when we've helped to get rid of the rest of our women and we do something wrong - we're dead. We'll have already been cleanly picked off. We must realize that we will never be admitted to the "good ole boys club." The men's club will not be supportive of us unless it is not in their best interest...and we will have destroyed any hope of support from the women who used to be around.

If it sounds depressing - <u>it is</u>...but there are things we can do which will be the subject of the next session.

PART II: What Women Coaches and Administrators Can Do To Cope With and Change the Current Situation in High School Athletics

In my previous presentation I suggested that women in athletics are faced with the prospect of extermination - that the influx of dollars and public visibility as a result of Title IX has made women's athletics worthy of the attention of men - and that the power positions in women's athletics - managerial and coaching the most lucrative sports - were fast falling to men. Further, I maintained that women were

(1) failing to recognize what was happening to them by succumbing to smokescreen explanations of why they were no longer being hired or retained
(2) slitting each other's throats by failing to support less fortunate women because blaming other women for problems was positively reinforced by male bosses
(3) playing into the hands of men by failing to recognize that fighting back is the only option.

I also suggested that the skills required for fighting were seldom in our repertoire. We've been socialized into peacefully and gratefully succumbing to the easy way out. The topic of this session is to share my impressions of the things women will have to do to regain control of women's athletics - recognizing that any gains will come slowly and at great risk to those brave enough to pursue their right to control women's athletics or to have an equal responsibility and role in the development of men's and women's athletics programs.

ASSUMPTION #1 Recognize that women have contributed to other women being historically disadvantaged. We are just as responsible for our plight. Women in the 30's decided that young women shouldn't be exploited by the abuses and excesses currently evident in collegiate sport. We pulled young women out and created the playday program - instead of jumping in to clean up men's athletics.

TACTIC #1 Increase the Awareness of Others

Train yourself to see through the smokescreen issues - the weak explanations of why women are all of a sudden not qualified to coach or administer. Be honest with yourself: "Am I as well qualified as I can be? What can I do as a woman to help other women? Why aren't I running clinics and conferences? Do I seek the help of men who are willing to help?

TACTIC #2 Sensitize Others

Talk about your needs and fears openly - not only with women in physical education and athletics, but with other sympathetic male and female administrators. People must know what you need. Talk with your friends. They're an important support system. Make your students aware even though many institutions discourage confiding in students. Talk to women and men in other departments, your colleagues as well as community groups and parents of women athletes.

The issues must be clearly stated - as women's issues - and we need to recognize that we have to help ourselves.

TACTIC #3 Create a Good Ole Girls Support Network

Learn from men's athletics. Work on creating a small social club. You must include even those people you dislike. We have not been trained to separate the personal and the professional. Meet regularly - add members. Women must be encouraged to be aggressive. They must receive your support. Create alliances with existing support groups for women such as political groups, NOW, the Women's Political Caucus. We must even support other women's causes. We have to get out of the closet. Plan support groups for each other. Call others when you need help. Rely on each other.

TACTIC #4 Do Everything You Can to Support the Advancement of Women in the Power Structure

Elect women to the Board of Education and/or the City Council. Make sure there are always women candidates applying for open positions. Serve on search and selection committees. Serve on personnel and policy committees. Never take down another woman in conversation with men's groups.

TACTIC #5 Learn Politics

Social events are important. Throw parties. Sports are important. Attend athletic events. Sponsor golf or tennis get togethers. Remember that most decisions are made before meetings - not during them.

Do your homework.
Get on the telephone.
Lobby your propositions.

- Keep records of your requests, complaints, of data on equal opportunity and employment practices.
- Know the law. Know your formal power options and discreetly let others know that you know your legal options. Avoid playing this card on top of the table.
- Learn the power structure. Sit down with others and draft a "who knows who that's who" chart. You'll be surprised how many women are potentially influential - wives/mothers especially. Use neutral bodies or safe bodies to front for you in dangerous areas.
- Serve on committees - every committee - bank your IOU's.

TACTIC #6 Become a Mentor and Get a Mentor

Central to perpetuating power is having someone in the system to act as your sponsor - your advocate. Once you're there, act as a mentor for another woman.

TACTIC #7 Learn About Money

Where does it come from? Who controls it at every level?

What's on the table - what's hidden? Be a student of budgets. Money is a primary source of power. Knowledge is also a source of power. Have both.

TACTIC #8 Learn About Your Strengths and Weaknesses

Know where you are most vulnerable. Ally yourself with people who compliment you by filling those voids.

TACTIC #9 Know Your Trade-offs

You can't win every battle. Know which to lose. Avoid being drained by putting efforts into lost causes. Calculate pluses and minuses before you attack. Know what the last straw is - the bottom line.

TACTIC #10 Understand Time - Use It To Your Advantage

Massive and significant changes usually happen the 2nd or 3rd time around. It takes time to convince people - to change their thinking. Don't give up after the first try. Failure is usually lack of effort or lack of sufficient time to persuade enough people.

TACTIC #11 Recognize That There Are Many Ways "To Go Around the Barn"

Be a purveyor of alternatives. Plan well. Do your homework all the time.